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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN PLAYS THE RUSSIAN AND CHRYSANTHEMUM
CLUBS FOR ALL IT CAN

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMB JON R. PURNELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The GOU appreciates Japan,s continued economic assistance and views the Central Asian (CA) plus Japan Forum as complimentary to other regional groups. The GOU said it will work with any &friendly8 country on projects. The Japanese government plans to reduce the number of aid programs in Uzbekistan unless the GOU becomes more transparent and works with the international community. End summary.

Regional politics at play in the CA plus Japan Forum

¶2. (C) Takeshi Yagi, Deputy Director-General, European Affairs Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, was in Tashkent in February. The Japanese Ambassador, Yuichi Kusumoto, told the Ambassador that the next Meeting of Ministers in the CA plus Japan Forum will take place in June in Tokyo. The Afghanis will participate due to the broad regional nature of issues such as land mines, narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Last year the Uzbeks opposed Afghanistan,s participation, but this year they appear to accept it. Uzbek FM Elyor Ganiev told the Japanese he plans to attend.

¶3. (C) The Forum meeting in Astana developed project proposals for regional and economic cooperation, including counterterrorism, narcotics, trade and energy. The deputy foreign ministers from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan attended. The Japanese were disappointed that the Uzbek ambassador appeared instead of the Deputy Foreign Minister, but were surprised when Turkmenistan,s Ambassador appeared, though he did not speak. Mr. Yagi told the Ambassador the Uzbeks had objected to the meeting being in Astana instead of in Tashkent.

Unpredictability of President Karimov results in less aid

¶4. (C) Yagi met with FM of Foreign Economic Relations, Investment and Trade, Alisher Shaikhov and Deputy Minister for Foreign Relations for Asia Anvar Salikhbaev (former ambassador to Pakistan). Shaikhov remarked that Uzbekistan sees the CA plus Japan Forum as &constructive and effective.8 He told Yagi he believes the U.S. and Europe incorrectly mix the issues of human rights with terrorism. Uzbekistan has national pride, he said, and therefore is

willing to extend relations with any &friendly country.8

15. (C) Through the CA plus Japan Forum, Japan intends to start small with technical system and information-sharing projects. Tokyo wants to promote the Forum, Kusumoto said, but has adopted a &careful and cautious8 approach to the &unpredictable and fragile situation8, especially considering the &unknown8 direction of President Karimov.

16. (C) GOJ does not see Uzbekistan working to improve the human rights and economic situation and therefore has decided to limit its programs. Due to problematic relations among Central Asian nations, GOJ does not want to fund large-scale, regional projects. It will continue to fund ongoing established programs; starting new programs will depend on Uzbekistan producing tangible reforms and explaining its actions to the international community. The GOJ wants to focus on the social sector, improving living conditions and promoting educational exchanges in Japan. (Note: The GOU readily gives Uzbek students permission to study in Japan. The Japanese Ministry of Education receives 30-40 students/year, with grants and special programs for 20-25 students/year. The Japanese Cultural Center in Tashkent, run solely by GOJ, receives full GOU cooperation for its cultural, business and language programs. End note.)

Doesn,t the Russian Club exclude the Chrysanthemum Club?

17. (C) Salikhbaev stressed to Yagi that neither the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) nor the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) presents a conflict to the CA plus Japan Forum. He accused the western press of incorrectly reporting

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that Russia and China are using the SCO in order to counter NATO. He said Uzbekistan is focused on the SCO,s economic, not military, potential. On EurAsEC, he disingenuously said the western press incorrectly crowns Russia the tsar, when it is only a coordinator.

18. (C) The Japanese found the meeting disappointing, especially Shaikhov,s 30 minute monologue on the human rights situation in Uzbekistan where, he claimed, the jails were open to observers and there were no human rights problems. In fact, he said, the situation is better than in the US and Europe. Shaikhov continued to describe the &wonderful economic conditions8 in Uzbekistan,s market economy, but cautioning that Japanese businesses should know the &risks.8 To Yagi,s disappointment, Shaikhov did not specifically mention that the GOU supports Japanese businesses. (Note: A bilateral meeting of private businessmen is scheduled for May in Tokyo. According to Yagi, Japanese businesses are pessimistic about investing in Uzbekistan and prefer Kazakhstan. End note.)

19. (C) Comment: The Uzbeks have yet to place constraints on the Japanese Government's aid and exchange programs. They want the aid to continue, especially if there are few to no strings attached. In the meetings, the GOU tried to portray itself not only as a peaceful democracy that respects human rights and seeks to further liberalize its market economy, but also as a victim of the international press. From Yagi,s comments it appears the GOU did not pull the wool over the GOJ,s eyes, as the GOJ plans to draw back its aid programs in Uzbekistan. We will watch to see how the GOU reacts to this aid reduction that is apparently based on events in Andijon.

PURNELL